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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; PRESIDENT BUSH'S TRIP TO LATIN AMERICA,
HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT, 03/08/07; BUENOS AIRES

UNCLEARED BY AN AMERICAN OFFICER

[1](#). SUMMARY STATEMENT

World news pages today lead with President Bush's trip to Latin American. There also continues to be reactions to the State Department's annual human rights report.

[1](#).2. OPINION PIECES

"A short-lived priority"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington correspondent with the daily-of-record "La Nacion", writes (03/08) "George W. Bush set off yesterday for his eighth and so far longest tour of Latin America with domestic rather than regional interests in mind. His goal is to improve his image in the eyes of the American people, hoping to be able to leave the White House in better standing and, if possible, hand over power to another Republican in 2009.

"On each one of his stops, he will hand out smiles, praise and some benefits and promises, and he will in exchange hope for good photos, reciprocal good vibes and, once back home, hopefully a slight improvement in his public image.

"The ghost of Hugo Chavez will of course haunt him every step of the way. But it is a mistake to believe that the tour aims at countering Chavez's influence in the region.

"... Once back in Washington, with many a promise made in the region in the fields of immigration, trade, ethanol or counter-narcotics, (Bush) will stick Latin America, again, in some remote place of his list of priorities."

"Old proposals presented as new"

Ana Baron, Washington correspondent for the leading daily "Clarín", writes 03-08), "In an attempt to recover initiative in the region, President George W. Bush starts today his Latin American trip with a new pro social justice discourse and a commitment to avoid any direct confrontation with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

"As soon as he lands in Brazil, Bush will realize, however, that his credibility ratings in the region are as low as his approval ratings in the US, and that words are not enough anymore to turn that around.

"The decision to shift to topics such as education, health and housing has been welcome by all observers. The change is no doubt related to the new pragmatism introduced by the State Department since Tom Shannon took charge of the Western Hemisphere affairs.

"Set to examine the ideas Bush presented to implement the new agenda, it is easy to discover, however, that old programs are being presented as new. There is no real original vision.

"Bush's trip, unless there happens to be a surprise, runs the risk of turning into a mere exercise of public relations."

"Angry at human rights report, Brazil receives Bush today"

Eleonora Gosman, correspondent in Sao Paulo for the leading daily "Clarín", reports "President George W. Bush arrives in Latin America today with little chances of offering much more than speeches, greetings and some pats on the back. But the trip also starts with a visible diplomatic slip. A human rights report released on Tuesday by the State Department sparked some wrath both at Itamaraty and at the Planalto presidential palace.

"The report says lawless executions by military and police authorities are widespread in the country...

"Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorin was quick to react and issue an official statement describing the US human rights report as 'unacceptable'... But the State Department faced Brazilian anger by announcing that the state of human rights in Brazil would be up for discussion between Lula and Bush.

"This 'slip' could be interpreted as an attempt by the US to regain the initiative after President Lula cut off a substantial part of the bilateral agenda by announcing Chavez and Venezuela would not be discussed.

"As Brazilian newspapers pointed out yesterday, the US does not have much to offer to win the support of Latin Americans in general or Brazilians in particular.

"Bush's visit is not expected to go down well with the embattled residents of Sao Paulo either. The daily hassles of its 11 million people will be incremented by a massive security operation that will plague the city with roadblocks."

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